



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OF THE

Edmund S. Muskie/FREEDOM Support Act
Graduate Fellowship Program

Submitted to:

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by

University of Iowa Social Science Institute

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***Edmund S. Muskie/FREEDOM Support Act
Graduate Fellowship Program Evaluation Report
A View of the First Five Years 1992-1996***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. The Program

The Edmund S. Muskie/FREEDOM Support Act Graduate Fellowship Program, begun in 1992, currently provides graduate level fellowships to citizens of the Newly Independent States in selected fields critical to the region's economic reform and political development. Participants are selected through annual, countrywide merit-based competitions and are subsequently placed at U.S. academic institutions for one or two years of academic study (depending upon the field) and participate in professional affiliations (internships).

Within the State Department, the program is supported by funds administered through the Office of Academic Exchange Programs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Currently, the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS (American Councils) and the Open Society Institute (OSI) hold grants from the State Department to administer the program, although the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and the Institute of International Education (IIE) both recruited and placed significant numbers of students in the earlier years. The funds for this program come from two sources: the FREEDOM Support Act and the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 covering Bureau activities promoting mutual understanding. In addition, significant cost contributions are provided by the administering organizations and by host universities. Since 1992, over 2,000 fellows have completed the program.

The overarching goal of the program is to foster democratic and economic reform in the independent states of the former Soviet Union. The program aims to do this by educating the best and the brightest early-to-mid-career professionals in fields¹ that are critical to reform and by exposing them to the U.S. market economy and to democracy in practice. The logic is that when these future leaders return home, they will succeed in those fields specified by the program,

¹ The Muskie/FSA Program currently targets the following academic fields: Business Administration, Education, Economics, Journalism/Mass Communications, Law, Library and Information Science, Public Administration, Public Policy, Environmental Management, Public Health and International Affairs.

contributing ideas, skills and competencies not needed or developed under communism. Because of their education and internships in key fields, they will have the experience and the technical skills to become significant leaders within their fields and exponents of market and democratic values to implement reform.

B. The Evaluation

In December of 1999, the Office of Policy and Evaluation (ECA/P) awarded a contract to the Iowa Social Science Institute at the University of Iowa (ISSI) to conduct an evaluation of the program. The evaluation had three primary goals:

- 1) to determine the extent to which the program has achieved its goal of giving participants significant knowledge, experience and credentials to become leaders within their designated fields;
- 2) to determine how career and personal developments and attitudes are related to economic and democratic reform; and
- 3) to understand alumni follow-on activities and assess alumni needs.

Working together with local social science and survey organizations, the Iowa Social Science Institute conducted focus groups and face-to face interviews with program alumni from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia who began the program between 1992 and 1996. In addition, focus groups and interviews were conducted with applicants from these four countries and these same years who successfully made it through the extremely competitive first round of selection, were interviewed, but ultimately were not selected as fellows. These semifinalists constitute a closely matched control group and any significant differences between the alumni and the semifinalists in terms of career developments, skills, leadership, aspirations, and attitudes can thus be attributed to the program experience. In total, 280 alumni and 459 semifinalists were interviewed, with response rates of 33% and 21% respectively. The interviews were conducted in the language of choice of the respondent, and lasted approximately 75 minutes.

C. Key Evaluation Findings

Listed below are the key findings in selected domains. These domains are critical to understanding whether the program has been successful in meeting its goals of promoting career success and leadership in key sectors; and whether providing appropriate knowledge, experience, and skills encourages economic and political orientations that support reform.

II. OCCUPATIONAL DESCRIPTION OF MUSKIE/FSA ALUMNI

<i>Sector</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significantly greater proportions of Muskie/FSA alumni are currently working in Banking and Financial Services, Law, and Consulting than are semifinalists.• Muskie/FSA alumni are significantly less likely than semifinalists to be working in Supply, Trade, and Commerce, and in the Education/Science Fields.• The proportion of those working in Supply, Trade, and Commerce increased for both alumni and semifinalists, whereas the proportion of those working in Education and Science declined significantly for both (although at a much greater rate for alumni).
<i>Type of Organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muskie/FSA alumni are significantly more likely than semifinalists to be employed by Foreign Firms or Governments; 43% of alumni work for such organizations, compared to 22% of semifinalists.• The proportion of those working for State Enterprises significantly declined for both Muskie/FSA alumni and semifinalists. Whereas semifinalists moved into private domestic firms and into international businesses and organizations, alumni moved almost exclusively into the international arena.
<i>Income</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muskie/FSA alumni reported significantly higher incomes than did semifinalists.• On average, Muskie/FSA alumni reported a 108% increase in income after participating in the program. Those working in Marketing, Law, and Communications experienced the greatest income increases.
<i>Supervisory Responsibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both before going on the program and after the program, Muskie/FSA alumni had on average significantly more supervisory responsibilities than did the semifinalists. Currently, the average Muskie/FSA alumnus supervises 9.7 people, whereas the average semifinalist supervises 7.8.
<i>Leadership Styles in the Workplace</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alumni were significantly more likely than semifinalists to value input from subordinates (85% versus 79%, respectively).• Alumni were significantly more likely than semifinalists to favor looser control (rather than close, authoritarian control) over their subordinates (82% versus 71%).• Alumni were significantly more likely than semifinalists to believe in delegating job responsibility (85% versus 76%).

III. PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION

- Language Skills*
- Almost 90% of alumni reported that they could understand 100% of a newspaper in English, compared to only 57% of semifinalists.
 - Alumni were more likely to understand spoken English; 57% of alumni versus 33% of semifinalists indicated that they would understand everything in an English language movie.
- Internet Usage and Links*
- Muskie/FSA alumni are much more likely than semifinalists to be connected to the Internet and to use it on a regular basis. 75% of alumni versus 55% of semifinalists report using e-mail or the Internet on a daily basis. In the week prior to the interview, 15% of the semifinalists did not use the Internet at all, compared to 5% of the alumni.
- Linkages with the United States*
- Muskie/FSA alumni report continued communication with friends (71%), professors (59%), and professional contacts from the internships (70%).
- Changes in Mentality*
- Muskie/FSA alumni report increased self-confidence (13%), increased ability to overcome difficulties (12%), and increased communications skills (9%) as the top three effects of the program on their “outlook” or mentality.

IV. DEMOCRATIC VALUES, MARKET VALUES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- Key Democratic and Market Orientations*
- Muskie/FSA alumni are significantly less likely to trade off democracy for strong leadership. 32% of semifinalists fully or partially agreed that their nation needs strong leadership more than it needs democracy while only 21% of alumni did so.
 - More alumni than semifinalists indicated that they thought a western-style democracy would be best for their country (56% versus 49%).
 - Muskie/FSA alumni are more likely to pursue economic reform even if it means significant short term hardships for individuals (78% versus 71%); they are less likely to favor income regulation (8% versus 16%), and less likely to favor government guarantees of work and a high standard of living (14% versus 20%).
- Political Participation*
- Contrary to program goals, semifinalists engage in community service activities more often than alumni do. 24 % of semifinalists participate monthly versus only 15% of finalists.
 - Despite lower relative participation levels, alumni exhibit more interest in politics than semifinalists: 38% of alumni are very interested in politics while only 28% of semifinalists are very interested.
 - A majority of alumni (54%) reported that they personally had a “great deal” of influence on society, while only one third (33%) of semifinalists answered the same.

V. COMPONENTS OF THE MUSKIE/FSA PROGRAM

Internship Program

- With regard to internships, nearly 40% of alumni surveyed stated that it was difficult or very difficult to find an internship position while in the United States.
- Fellows who participated in internships were more likely to find that the skills they learned while in the US were very useful to them (as opposed to only somewhat useful).

Alumni Activities

- Alumni events were seen as not very helpful largely due to shortcomings in addressing professional interests and skills. This varies by country with Ukraine having the lowest percent of alumni fully satisfied with alumni events and Kazakhstan with the highest percent of satisfied alumni.

D. Program Success

This study evaluates the success of the program in terms of its goals and objectives. The overarching goal of the program is to foster democratic and economic reform in the independent states of the former Soviet Union through educational exchange. This approach develops the best and the brightest early-to-mid-career professionals in fields that are critical to reform with the hope that in the future these leaders will contribute to the broader society.

From the findings above, it is clear that the Muskie/FSA Graduate Fellowship Program has been successful in fostering the career development of individuals. Not only have participants moved at greater rates into key sectors of the economy targeted for reform – especially business and law – than the semifinalists, they are also much more likely to be positioned in the international arena. Further, program alumni appear to have significant influence within the organizations where they are employed; they report significantly higher incomes, indicate greater job satisfaction, supervise significantly more employees, and evince more democratic ideas about workplace leadership than do the semifinalists. Beyond the workplace, Muskie/FSA alumni and semifinalists are generally quite similar in terms of their values, but the Muskie/FSA alumni do differ significantly on certain key market and democratic issues. Alumni, for example, are more willing to push for reform despite short-term hardships for individuals, and are more likely to favor a western-style democracy. Moreover, alumni explicitly acknowledge that they directly utilize the technical and substantive knowledge they gained during their academic programs in their current jobs. They also give a higher assessment of their English language skills. They report increased self-confidence, increased ability to overcome difficulties, and increased communication skills as a result of the program, and are significantly more likely than semi-finalists to report that they have a great deal of influence on society. At the same time, the Muskie/FSA alumni are, significantly less engaged in community service than semifinalists, and are less likely to engage in politics, even though they indicate greater interest in political matters.

These findings suggest that the fundamental logic of the program – that education and experience in key fields needed for the transition will promote the career advancement of individuals – is sound. For the short-term, the program has succeeded in producing a cadre of

professional leaders with the skills and power to implement reform and who espouse favorable attitudes towards economic reform and democracy.

Given the long-term nature of social transformation and reform, and the relatively short time-frame of the study, the extent to which the alumni as a collective have been able to affect reform on a broader scale within their societies remains unclear. The key to affecting broader reform may lie in their increased self-confidence and their belief that they are able to affect societal change. The true impact of alumni on the institutions in which they work, as well as the collective societal effect of these evolving institutions can only be determined with the passage of time.

E. The Significant Lesson Learned

The single most significant lesson learned from this evaluation is the inherent difficulty in keeping track of a population of highly mobile and highly successful professionals. The initial intent of the evaluation was to interview all alumni from the first five program years from all four target countries. However, attempts to contact alumni using the extant databases yielded only 50% of the alumni living in these four countries with verifiable contact information. Significant numbers are living and working outside of their home countries, and still others are working within the NIS but their addresses are unknown.

Without continued contact with alumni after the completion of the program – regardless of whether they are living at home or abroad – it is difficult to assess either the short-term goals of individual career development and enhanced professional activity within key sectors, or the long-term goals of market and democratic reform and development.

The program has an opportunity to foster the continued acquisition of technical skills needed for reform and to help build networks among reform-minded individuals through organized alumni activity. However, the program is limited in its ability to support alumni and build upon program successes if there is no way to contact these individuals. Alumni are the most vital resource of the program and of their respective countries.

It is therefore absolutely imperative that 1) energy and resources be dedicated to keeping in touch with alumni, and that a systematic and sophisticated strategy be developed for doing so; and 2) the nature of alumni organization and support be changed to fulfill alumni needs and bolster alumni potential.